

**U.S. Department of Justice**

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**NEWS RELEASE**

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Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced today that on February 25, 2004, a federal grand jury returned a superseding indictment in *United States v. Allen, et al.* The indictment, targeting the Third Ward Gang of Petersburg, Virginia, added six new defendants and new racketeering charges under the federal RICO statute. These new charges include allegations of murder and attempted murder.

According to the indictment, from 1998 through 2003, the Third Ward Gang operated an open air drug market in the Heights area of Petersburg, Virginia. The indictment alleges that gang members, often armed with firearms, manufactured and distributed crack cocaine throughout the day and night and maintained control over their territories through numerous acts of violence and intimidation.

Twenty-eight gang members were charged on November 6, 2003 and December 3, 2003 with conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of crack cocaine. Eighteen defendants have already pled guilty to the conspiracy charge and face a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and a maximum term of life imprisonment when they are sentenced later this year.

The superseding indictment added the following defendants: Antoine D. Allen, a.k.a. "Ski," age 20; Mario L. Allen, age 23; Ronald Blowe, a.k.a. "Putt," age 22; Robert Thomas, a.k.a. "Rob Rip," age 22; Jerel L. Toran, age 23; and Curtis Watson, a.k.a. "C-Murder," age 22. Among other things, the newly-added racketeering offense alleges that the Third Ward Gang operated as a crack cocaine distribution enterprise and that to further the business of that enterprise, gang members murdered Gerald Ruffin on June 22, 2000 and Robert Brabson, Jr., on August 28, 2001. The additional RICO charge carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

United States Attorney McNulty stated: "Through our federal and local partnership we want to change the lives of law abiding citizens in Petersburg. It is a new day and this is just the next step in our on-going efforts."

Petersburg Police Chief Morris Jones added: "This serves as a warning for those who continue to be involved in these types of illegal activities; we will not cease in our efforts to do whatever is necessary to make our community safer."

Also announcing the sentence is Donald Thompson, Special Agent-In-Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Richmond Resident Office.

The case was investigated by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Petersburg Police Department and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Roderick C. Young.

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